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STATE FOR EUR EUR/AGS, SECDEF FOR OSD - RICHARD DOTSON

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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN GETS TOP BILLING AT MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The need for greater Allied solidarity in meeting the demands of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan was the main topic of discussion at the February 8-10 Munich Security Conference (see ref A for full overview of conference). It was not only the subject of Secretary Gates' prepared remarks, but also the focus of a panel on

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the upcoming NATO Summit in Bucharest and a pre-conference event hosted by the chair of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian wing of the CDU. Gates set down a marker that NATO could not "become a two-tiered Alliance of those who are willing to fight and those who are not." Gates, who had come to Munich straight after the February 7-8 informal NATO defense ministerial meeting in Vilnius, said that "such a development, with all its implications for collective security, would effectively destroy the Alliance." While Sen. John McCain unfortunately could not attend this year's conference, Sen. Lieberman and the rest of the U.S. delegation gave their German counterparts plenty of "straight talk" about the challenges in Afghanistan and the need for Germany to join the U.S. and other Allies in "digging deep" to do more outside the north.
END SUMMARY.

Lead-up to the conference

12. (SBU) Afghanistan's top billing at the February 8-10 Munich Security Conference was ensured by the controversy unleashed in late January by the leaking of a letter sent by Secretary Gates to Defense Minister Jung. The letter, one of 25 that SecDef sent to his NATO counterparts ahead of the February 7-8 NATO defense ministerial in Vilnius, asked Germany to consider sending maneuver forces to the south of Afghanistan. Jung, FM Steinmeier, the Chancellery spokesmen and the defense policy spokesmen of several political parties immediately rushed out to publicly reject the idea, insisting that Germany would continue to focus its efforts primarily in the north and ruling out sending combat troops to the south. The official rejections of the SecDef request were followed by press stories based on unnamed sources at the Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry, claiming that the White House had been "surprised" to learn about the SecDef letter and raising questions about whether

it was supported by President Bush.

SecDef remarks

13. (U) In his February 10 conference address, entitled "The Future Development of Afghanistan," Secretary Gates set down a marker that NATO could not "become a two-tiered Alliance of those who are willing to fight and those who are not." Gates, who had come to Munich straight after the NATO defense ministerial meeting in Vilnius, said that "such a development, with all its implications for collective security, would effectively destroy the Alliance." Noting that "any theology that attempts to clearly divide civilian and military operations" is "unrealistic," Gates also called for NATO and the EU to find "ways to work together better" and to "share certain roles." Gates warned, however, against a division of labor where some allies would opt "only for stability and civilian operations, forcing other Allies to bear an disproportionate share of the fighting and dying." He emphasized the urgent need for a senior civilian representative to coordinate all non-military international assistance, pointing out that the current international effort adds up to less than the sum of its parts. Gates also outlined how violent Islamic extremism poses a direct threat to European security and called on opinion leaders and government officials to make the case "publicly and persistently" that success in Afghanistan is critical in addressing this threat.

14. (U) During the discussion period, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) emphasized that Gates had expressed not only the Administration viewpoint on Afghanistan, but the position of the entire U.S. government, including Congress. He predicted that whoever won the presidential election in November would adopt the same position. He also pointed out that the main lesson from the Iraqi surge was that "numbers matter" in terms of the military component of a counterinsurgency force. Lieberman underscored Gates' call for European policymakers to make the case to their publics about why

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they could not afford to fail in Afghanistan.

15. (U) Several German parliamentarians defended the Bundeswehr's current orientation in the north and complained about U.S. "finger-pointing." Greens Party Leader Reinhard Buetikofer claimed that Germany had the fourth highest number of casualties in ISAF and noted that Germany would already be taking on a combat role by assuming responsibility for the quick reaction force (QRF) in the north this coming summer. Gates clarified that he was not suggesting that Germany move its forces out of the north and agreed that it was important that Germany continue its "excellent" work there. Gates noted he had never singled out a particular country for criticism. Instead, he was pointing out the obligation of the Alliance as a whole to do more, especially in the south, where the challenges were the greatest. The U.S. had "dug deep" in order to send an additional 3,200 Marines to Afghanistan, mostly to the south, and he hoped other Allies would consider doing so as well.

NATO panel discussion of Afghanistan

16. (U) Afghanistan was also one of the main topics of discussion at the February 9 panel entitled "The Atlantic Alliance: Bucharest and Beyond," which included NATO Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer, German Defense Minister Jung, and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC). Jung emphasized the extent of Germany's current contribution in Afghanistan, noting that as commander of Regional Command North, Germany is responsible for about one-third of the country which, he claimed, is becoming increasingly dangerous. In this regard, he noted that the single deadliest attack in Afghanistan in 2007 occurred in the north (Baghlan province). Jung argued that Germany's contribution already met the requirements for Alliance solidarity and said Germany's ability to do more, especially outside the north, was constrained by a lack of public support and Germany's own history.

17. (U) De Hoop Scheffer emphasized the need to fill shortfalls of troops and equipment in ISAF and to eliminate caveats on their

deployment. Later, however, he said it would be "unfair" to say the Germans were not doing their share. He noted that there was, in fact, violence in the north and that the German QRF in the north would be available for deployments in the south and elsewhere in emergency situations.

¶18. (U) Sen. Graham expressed appreciation for the German contribution in the north as well, but emphasized that it was incumbent upon all Allies to do more given the stakes in Afghanistan. Calling Germany "the heart and soul of NATO," Graham said that the Alliance had been established for Germany and now needed Germany's support against new threats. He accepted de Hoop Scheffer's assurances that NATO was "not losing," but added that he was "not sure we're winning." To ensure success, Allies had to send more forces to the south, as the U.S. was doing with its temporary deployment of 3,200 Marines.

Pre-conference debate at CSU HQ

¶19. (SBU) At an off-the-record pre-conference lunch hosted by Erwin Huber, chair of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian wing of the CDU, Afghanistan was also the main topic of conversation. Fully supporting comments made by EUR A/S Fried, who underscored the need for additional forces in Afghanistan, Hillary Clinton foreign policy advisor Richard Holbrooke said he was "frankly disappointed with what the Europeans have done so far" and found the German reaction to the SecDef letter "quite troubling." He expressed concern that Germany did not understand that the Alliance faced a strategic, existential threat in Afghanistan and noted that in a counterinsurgency situation, "if the insurgents are not losing, they're winning." He pointed out that while a new U.S. administration -- Republican or Democratic -- was likely to seek a closer, more cooperative relationship with Europe, this would mean more U.S. demands to contribute to NATO operations like ISAF, not fewer.

¶10. (SBU) MOD State Secretary Christian Schmidt, CSU parliamentary Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and Huber emphasized that Germany was already the third largest troop contributor in Afghanistan and was planning to significantly increase its involvement by tripling its

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contribution to the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and taking over the QRF in the north. While the QRF would be available to provide emergency assistance on a case-by-case basis, they argued there was simply no public support for deploying German troops into combat in the south. The German public did not support what the Bundeswehr was doing now in the north, much less taking on a new combat role. Zu Guttenberg warned that if the German government pushed too hard on this issue, it risked the whole deployment.

¶11. (SBU) John McCain foreign policy advisor Randy Scheunemann, former Ambassador to NATO Robert Hunter and President of the American Council on Germany William Drozdiak pushed back and challenged German officials to exercise more political leadership in making the case for the Afghanistan mission to the German public. A/S Fried asked German officials to re-consider whether Germany's effort in Afghanistan was really commensurate with its abilities and the stakes there as outlined by Holbrooke and others. The Head of the German Marshall Fund Office in Berlin, Constanze Stelzenmueller, pointed out that many German papers have editorialized in favor of Germany expanding its operations outside the north in the name of Alliance solidarity. This indicated that, in fact, the German public may be more receptive to Germany expanding the scope of operations outside the north than politicians are giving them credit for.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) While Sen. John McCain unfortunately could not attend this year's Munich Security Conference, Sen. Lieberman and the rest of the U.S. delegation gave their German counterparts plenty of "straight talk" about the challenges in Afghanistan and the need for Germany to join the U.S. and other Allies in "digging deep" to do

more outside the north. It was especially helpful for the CODEL and prominent Americans on the SecDef delegation to stress the need for more political leadership in winning German popular support for the mission in Afghanistan. There are signs that the public debate spawned by the leaked SecDef letter is creating new opportunities to strengthen popular understanding and support for this mission.

¶13. (U) For more information on the 44th Conference and past conferences, visit: "<http://www.securityconference.de>" and "<http://munich.usconsulate.gov>."

¶14. (U) This report has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

¶15. (U) Previous reporting from Munich is available on our SIPRNET website at www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/munich/.

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